

Interview: How to Amplify Your Open House Opportunities to Generate More Income



The following is an interview with **CARMELA ZITA KAPELERIS**. Carmela is an experienced Real Estate Broker, Accredited Buyer Agent, International Real Estate Specialist, Seniors Real Estate Specialist, Facilitator, Coach, Author, Speaker and Marketing Brand Expert from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information, email Carmela at info@kapeleris.com.

What is the goal of an open house? Has this changed over time?

Carmela: The goal of an open house is first and foremost to sell your clients home. The secondary goal is to integrate and attract new prospects and generate buyer and seller leads. The ultimate goal is to integrate and brand yourself within the community and become the Neighborhood Real Estate Expert!

You can brand yourself by doing the following:

- Educating the public and promoting your knowledge of the area.
- Becoming an expert on market value schools, stores, community centres, transit lines, access to highways and all amenities. This allows you to become more than just a salesperson.
- Making your open house resemble a community event by having themed out-of-the-box, branded events with multiple-area signage (from 20- 100 branded signs) for maximum results, branding, retention and visibility.
- Co-marketing with local businesses in order to create referral partners and collaboration for greater exposure to the open house property, to your brand and to the open house community event.
- Promoting yourself and your brand by being an expert/specialist in the area through bi-monthly marketing to your geographical farm area as well as open house geographical farming.
- Branding yourself through Institutional Marketing such as billboards, bus shelters, bus wraps, bus benches, car wraps, and more.
- Branding yourself through your website, video blogs, social media, Trulia, Zillow, Kijiji, Craigslist and all internet branding.

Yes, open houses have changed over time due to the rise of the digital age. 80% of real estate leads are coming from the internet. So once you've brought in the leads, the key is to get those people away from the computer and establish face-to-face connections so that you can build and make the relationships stronger. One way to have personal interaction is to host what I call "themed and branded open house community events," giving your prospects the opportunity to attend and get to know you on a personal level.

What is the single biggest mistake agents make when hosting an open house?

Carmela: There isn't one single mistake that most agents make, rather it is a series of combinations of mistakes that result in an unsuccessful open house. One of the biggest mistakes agents make when it comes to open houses is that they 'wing it' and as a result, they are unable to generate high demand from open houses.

However, they can improve by doing the following:

- Marketing and promoting the open house during the week leading up to the open house and make it a community event for the neighborhood!
- Brand and integrate yourself into the neighborhood. For example: send out invites, flyers, postcards, and go to local businesses in the area and invite them to co-promote your open house. They'll be happy to leverage this opportunity to expand their own brand.
- Educate yourself about the neighborhood so that you can offer a unique value proposition to the buyer or seller leads that walk into the open house.
- Use numerous open house signs (I recommend 20- 100 signs or sandwich boards). If you have a team and are able to do 2, 3 or 4 open houses that day, the multiple signage integrates all the open houses together for more powerful marketing and brand recognition. Make sure to get the signs out a few hours before the open house.
- Conduct the open house properly. This includes staging and showing the house, keeping track and order of visitors, and asking key questions to determine how ready the lead is to book an appointment.
- Engage with visitors as they come to the door - introduce yourself and be friendly.
- Get the open house attendees to share their information with you for future relationships. This information can be used for you to follow up with the lead and begin developing a relationship. To encourage people to submit their information and provide feedback on the open house, offer a draw for gifts (gift basket, gift certificate, etc).
- Always make sure to follow up immediately with the leads that visited your open house and keep close touch with them through a CRM system.

With all these themes we have giveaway bags that includes our 8-page branded newspaper that displays our bio, all our listings for sale in the area, mortgage sheets prepared for the open house property, brochures/feature sheets of the open house property, and an info sheet with schools/neighborhood amenities. This ensures that attendees are leaving with added value to their open house experience.

What are 5 important steps for hosting an open house?

Carmela: 5 important steps for open houses are:



For you, the agent, to select the right property. Make sure the house is reasonably priced, staged and located in a popular neighborhood. Finding the right house will help in generating leads and closing sales. Make sure to begin promoting the event about 3-5 days before the open house in order to gain maximum guest attendees and additional lead generation.



Pre-open house preparation: ideally you want to begin marketing the open house about 5-7 days before if you are placing flyers throughout the neighborhood, direct mail, door knocking or phone canvassing to invite people.



Provide unique and personable experiences during the site visit to the customers so that everyone feels comfortable, can envision themselves in the home, and want to close a deal with you.



Recall the value of your brand and property: about 3 days before the open house, study your market thoroughly. During the open house you will be seen as an expert in your area.



Follow up right after the open house and the weeks following the open house. You can send surveys allowing visitors to rate their motivation and satisfaction. You can extend this to 1-3 months so you continue to learn and adjust, while continuing to develop a relationship with them.

Describe your marketing plan leading up to the open house.

Carmela: The Marketing strategy and daily preparation leading up to the open house is crucial in determining the number of people that attend your open house and also the amount of leads you generate. So make sure you are getting out there and knocking the doors of about 100 homes to the left and 100 homes to the right of your upcoming open house. Focus on your farm area.

Also putting an open house rider on your For Sale sign 5 days before your open house helps bring in leads. Place ads in the newspaper, send direct mail invites, call your database and invite previous open house attendees to help increase attendance of your open house. This could potentially result in hundreds of additional leads before the actual open house day.

Once you have some marketing strategies in place, push the open house event on social media, (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube Video), on your website, and blog. Also make a landing page on Kijiji or Craigslist to significantly increase the reach for acquiring new buyers and sellers to your open house.



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Carmela Kapeleris

How can real estate agents turn their open house into a true event? Should these events be theme-based, holiday-based, etc?

Carmela: We always have 8 ft RE/MAX balloons in front of the houses hosting the open event to incentivize people in the area to join the event. We also offer incentives to reel the guests in early. However, we try to create theme-based open houses to significantly boost attendees.

Here are some of the themes I follow and suggest:

- **Halloween Theme:** We give pumpkins to the first 10 families, and candy loot bags, chips, cheetos to kids, pumpkins cookies, and coffee/apple cider for adults.
- **Easter Theme:** We give Easter Lily plants to the first 5-10 families, and chocolate loot bags for kids.
- **Wine and Cheese Theme:** We host a wine basket draw giveaway, and offer wine tasting from a 'make your own wine' store (including coupons and discounts).
- **The Guest Connect:** We give clipboards to rate each room, the house exterior, basement, and price - which provides info for the seller and the agent. Then we provide small gifts to those that participate.
- **Garage Sale:** Sometimes we encourage our client to have a garage sale at the same time as the open house to attract more people. This helps them make some money while de-cluttering their home, and trying to sell their home.
- **Summer BBQ Theme:** We park a cart in the driveway acting as a hot dog stand, ice cream cart (rental) and get a friend or family member to man it in order to save time.
- **Spotlight Local Businesses in the area:** This will attract attention to your open house while doing the good deed of showcasing a local restaurant (who in turn will help promote you). You come off as an expert in the area and a supporter of the local lifestyle.
- **Art Galleries:** Showcase or lend artwork for staging the home. Ensure that you have a rep on hand to assist you with the setup.
- **Local book stores:** showcase new releases and invite community book clubs to host their meetings during the open house.
- **Local community newspaper:** they may come out and cover your event. Its free promotion.

How do you get open house visitors to write their contact information down on a sign-in sheet?

Carmela: Visitors are sometime hesitant to sign or leave correct information. To ease the anxiety, we tell them that it is our security and safety requirement to protect our seller/buyer. In addition to that we also make it fun by offering them a chance to win something like lottery tickets, restaurant gift certificate, sports tickets, a wine basket and other gift baskets - even gingerbread houses during the Christmas season. They love the opportunity to win gifts so they will fill out all of their correct information.

Some of the questions we try to get answers to from visitors are:

- Are you working with an Agent?
- Have you signed a Buyer Representation Agreement?
- Are you thinking of buying or selling this year?
- Would you like a Free Home Market Evaluation?

Sign in can be a paper form or digital with the Open Home Pro App. After the open house, follow up with all your visitors through a digital CRM tool like Top Producer, Boomtown, or Tiger Lead. Once you gather the contact information (and assuming they checked off that they wish to be contacted), then you would add them to your database and separate them into categories being: A-Hot lead, B-Warm lead, C-Cold lead and then again by sub category of Buyers, Sellers and Prospects.

For buyers, you would send them homes that you think they would like to view (that matches their criteria) and for sellers, you would send them information about selling and homes that are for sale in their neighborhood. You can send both categories quarterly newsletters to keep in touch and seasonal postcards as well as birthday and anniversary cards. This will help you begin to develop a relationship with them and become the real estate agent of their choice.

I would like to add an important piece here too that agents should always remember. Note that in this market, a well-priced, staged open house rarely stays on the market for longer than a week or two. If it does stay longer, it is usually due to price, location and/or the condition of the home - but sometimes due to all three!

In this case, a new open house is hosted to adjust the price and condition of the home. One suggestion would be to host a "Guest Connect Open House" - where the customer or open house attendee is handed a clip board with a form and are asked to rate the rooms of the house and share what they think the price of the home would be. This information is then shared with the seller on how the buyer perceives the home and why it is not selling in today's market. So don't give up if your house is not selling soon enough. There are options for you.

If you could share one last comment with agents that you have not already shared - what would it be?

Carmela: Always have at least **two** agents doing the open house together- not only for safety reasons but also to service the open house attendees' needs and questions promptly. It is a priority to keep order so you can qualify the buyers and make an appointment with them during the open house. In order to appropriately pay attention to every prospect, I'd suggest not allowing more than 2 or 3 families be in the home at the same time. Let people wait outside for a few minutes before letting them enter the house. This way you can make sure that every visitor has a great time during your open house.

Here are a few additional best practices to keep in mind during the open house:

- Make sure you open all the blinds and lights in dim areas so the house looks spacious and bright - use accent lighting or play soft music.
- Make sure to get rid of all odors, smoke, pet, food, etc - use a lamp burner, candles, sanitizers and/or deodorizers.
- Close all lids on the toilets, clean out closets.
- Take away all valuables like money and jewelry.
- Make sure to clean the home before-hand. This means no clutter. Instead, have neutral decor and stage appropriately.
- Make sure the owner is comfortable with not being home, and giving you full access to the house.

Extra Reminders:

- Remember that the same old thinking will give you the same results!
- Have a positive mindset and change your attitude!
- Think out of the box and have a successful open house!

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